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SUBJECT: PROFILE OF THE LARGE AND ACTIVE NORWEGIAN DIASPORA
COMMUNITY IN THE U.S.

Ref: SECSTATE 86401

¶1. (U) Summary: The Norwegian diaspora in the United States is a large identifiable group with some 4.5 million people and maintains deep and firmly institutionalized connections to Norway. This cable responds to refTel request for information about this group. Several Norwegian-American organizations exist, including for example, the Sons of Norway, the Norwegian Seaman's Church, and the Norse Federation. Such organizations provide travel grants to Norway, educational scholarships, and awards. The Norwegian diaspora communities are also deeply engaged in scientific, engineering, medical, and educational institution building. For example, the Norwegian government hosts a transatlantic science week in the United States, attended by American and Norwegian officials, to facilitate and increase cooperation between the two countries and put bilateral agreements on science and technology to work. Another initiative is The Kavli Foundation, which established research institutes at leading universities in the United States and around the world. The foundation sponsors science symposiums, workshops, and partners to support the internationally renowned Kavli Prize, recognizing research excellence in science.

¶2. (U) Summary continued: Opportunities for diaspora engagement in Norwegian conflict resolution and peace building also exist, such as the Norwegian-American Parliamentary Exchange Program (NAPEP) and the Norwegian-American Parliamentary Staff Exchange Program. Through these programs, the Norwegian Government invites members of Congress and their staff to visit Norway and meet Norwegian politicians, government officials, and a variety of interest groups.

A Norwegian Expatriate Parliament was also created, by which Norwegian Americans can discuss issues with the Norwegian Parliament. Post has had limited direct engagement to date with the diaspora community, as our work focuses primarily on developments in Norway. However, given our common goals, our Public Affairs section does link up occasionally with diaspora community groups, and our Front Office and Pol/Econ section are closely involved with such efforts as NAPEP and, when possible, the GON's Transatlantic Science Week. End Summary.

Background: Norwegian Diaspora

¶3. (U) Leaving aside exciting tales of Viking history and conquests, and starting from the more recent history in the 1800s, many Norwegians immigrated to the United States and sent remittances back to Norway. Many eventually returned to Norway later in life. However, many also remained in the U.S. and became dedicated to helping other Norwegians get there, too. They worked as immigration agents, sent advertisements to local Norwegian newspapers on the benefits of immigrating to the United States, and wrote to family and friends encouraging them to come to America. Through all this, the Norwegian-American diaspora has always held on to its heritage and sought to keep its ties to Norway alive through organizations, education, cultural awareness and much more.

14. (U) Norwegians are an identifiable group in the United States. According to www.Norway.org, the Norwegian Government's official internet portal, there are more than 4.5 million people of Norwegian ancestry in the United States today. Of these, approximately 3 million claim Norwegian ancestry as their sole ancestry. Large populations of Norwegians and Norwegian-Americans are found in Minnesota, Washington state, California, Illinois, Wisconsin, North and South Dakota, and Iowa.

Norwegian-American Organizations

15. (U) There are several organizations in the United States with the goal of maintaining strong ties between Norwegians and Norwegian-Americans: The Norse Federation/Nordmanns Forbundet (www.norseman.no), is a nonprofit organization founded in 1907 which seeks to strengthen cultural and personal ties between Norway and Norwegians abroad, as well as their descendants and friends of Norway throughout the world. Benefits of membership include discounts in travel, published news information on Norway, educational grants, membership tours and pilgrim hikes. The Norwegian Seaman's Church (www.sjomannskirken.no) is a Lutheran-based resource center and organization that answers the needs of expatriates, Norwegians, or those who need to keep in touch and ascertain their social, cultural, and spiritual sense of belonging. They have churches and mobile pastoral services available in the U.S. and other countries for seamen, students, business people, tourists, families and other traveling Norwegians. The Federation was established to secure the moral and religious education of Scandinavian seafarers, but to also provide them a "breathing space" where a fellow countryman could lend an ear.

16. (U) Sons of Norway (www.sofn.com), founded in 1895 by 18 COMMUNITY IN THE U.S.

Norwegian immigrants in Minnesota, initially supported members and their families from financial hardships during sickness or death. Later they expanded their mission to include the preservation of Norwegian heritage and culture through language camps, heritage classes, scholarships, handicrafts, and cooking in the United States and Canada. The American Scandinavian Association (ASA, www.scandinavian-dc.org) is a non-profit cultural organization incorporated in the District of Columbia. The goals of ASA are: to promote cultural exchange between the United States and the Nordic Countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden; to increase understanding of the Nordic peoples and societies among Americans; and to provide a forum where people interested in Scandinavia can meet and enjoy Nordic culture and activities.

Educational Exchanges

17. (U) Connections between the Norwegian Diaspora and Norway are deep, old, and firmly institutionalized. There are several venues through which the Diaspora can reach out. For example, the Lutheran Brotherhood Insurance Company in Minnesota, awards an annual "His Majesty King Olav V" travel grant to cover travel expenses for a two-week stay in Norway. This was established in 1985 in the hope of giving a special grant to a Norwegian-American who contributed in a particular way to Norwegian-American culture. The Emigration Fund of 1975 was established by the Norwegian Parliament to provide a scholarship to Americans for advanced or specialized study in Norway for subjects dealing with emigration, history, and relations between the two countries.

18. (U) The College of St. Olaf in Northfield, Minnesota, a four-year college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, was founded by Norwegians in 1874, originating in the immigrants' desire for higher learning and to prepare immigrant Norwegians and others for careers in business, politics, religion and other professions. This college has contributed significantly to the American liberal arts education while maintaining an academic center with a strong program for the study of Scandinavian culture. St. Olaf also hosts the Norwegian-American historical association (www.naha.stolaf.edu), a private membership organization dedicated to preserving the Norwegian-American experience.

19. (U) The Norwegian-American Foundation (www.noram.norway.com) was

created in 2001 to inform North Americans on contemporary Norway and the Norwegian-American community as well as ensuring that new generations in Norway and the United States learn of the history and strong bonds between the two countries. Selected other educational Norwegian-American organizations are: www.lakselaet.org, www.torskeklubben.org, scandinavianstudy.org, and www.amscan.org.

¶10. (U) There also exists a collaborative effort among six U.S.-based colleges that share a common identity as institutions with historic origins in early Norwegian immigration to the United States. Called the Nordic American Learning Alliance (NALA), the six institutions -- Augsburg College, Augustana College, Luther College, Concordia College, Pacific Lutheran University, and University of North Dakota -- participate in efforts to assist Norwegian students by helping them through the admissions process and providing them scholarship opportunities. These institutions are known for their high-quality education and their ties to the Evangelical Lutheran Church (www.gradusa.org).

¶11. (U) Finally, the Norwegian Researchers and Teachers Association of North America (NORTANA) is a non-profit organization for researchers and teachers based in the United States and involved in Norwegian language, literature, and area studies. NORTANA promotes the study of Norwegian and Norway at all levels, and works to facilitate cooperation between scholars engaged in these fields (www.nortana.net).

Scientific and Research Exchanges

¶12. (U) The Norwegian Diaspora community is deeply engaged toward scientific, engineering, medical, and education institution building. For example, the Norwegian Government hosts an annual Transatlantic Science Week in North America, involving multiple government ministries. This year's event took place in Minneapolis, MN on September 27-30, a location reflecting the area's heritage as well as highlighting the close ties between the Norwegian and American societies. Science Week began as a strategy for Norway to strengthen bonds with the United States and Canada but evolved into an annual event. The main goal is to increase transatlantic cooperation in research, innovation, and higher education. The GON also wanted to create a transatlantic arena to showcase Norwegian research and innovation as well as collaborative activities (www.norway.org).

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¶13. (U) Another example is the Kavli Prize established by Norwegian-born physicist, business leader, innovator, and philanthropist Fred Kavli. He moved to the United States in 1956 and in 2000 founded The Kavli Foundation in Oxnard, CA, to support scientific research around the world. The foundation has established research institutes at leading universities in the United States and around the world; it sponsors science symposiums and workshops, and it awards the internationally renowned Kavli Prize, recognizing research excellence in astrophysics, neuroscience, and nanoscience (www.kavliprize.no). Separately, the "Fulbright Arctic Chair" is awarded to a Distinguished Norwegian Researcher Lecturer program that allows for researchers, scholars, and lecturers in the academic fields of Arctic Geology, Arctic Biology, Arctic Geophysics and Arctic Technology to study in the United States. (www.fulbright.no).

Norwegian Government Outreach to the Diaspora

¶14. (U) The Friends of Norway caucus in the Senate and in the House of Representatives was established in 1999 by Norwegian-Americans in Congress to work towards strengthening the contacts between Norwegian and U.S. elected legislators, and exchange views between U.S. and Norwegian politicians on issues, interests, and policies bilaterally between Norway and the United States. Current co-chairman of the Friends of Norway Caucus, Representative Rick Larsen, believes it to be important to Norway and the United States to cooperate strongly on major issues facing the two countries. He believes that, "As the polar ice caps recede, it will become very important for Arctic nations to work together to ensure the fair and safe use of Arctic resources, and I hope that United States and Norway will work together in that regard in the future".

¶15. (U) The Norwegian Parliament, or "Storting", in 2007 created forums and a secondary parliament for Norwegian expatriates and their descendants called "Norgestinget," or Norwegian Expatriate Parliament (NEP), where they can discuss issues and voice their concerns and problems related to the Norwegian Government. The first meeting was held June 22, 2007, where 60-70 interested individuals and representatives from Norwegian communities and associations around the world attended. The assembly agreed to establish 'Norgestinget' with the Norse Federation as the permanent secretariat. The next meeting was scheduled for 2008 but postponed until summer 2009. So far, post is unaware of updates regarding the 2009 meeting. The project also includes online forums where Norwegians and their descendants abroad are able to contribute ideas and thoughts (www.norgestinget.no).

¶16. (U) Comment: Post has limited direct engagement with the diaspora community. However, given the natural linkages between our goals and those of many of the diaspora community groups, we do link up occasionally. For example, we are reviewing opportunities to collaborate with Sons of Norway regarding an educational exchange program. We have also asked Sons of Norway for an educational grant to send a recruiter to the United States to identify potential exchange host families for programs with Norway. In addition, the Norse Federation, or Norsemannsforbundet, applies annually for grants to support the attendance of Norwegian teachers at a summer institute at Luther College in Iowa, which post has often been able to supply. Finally, post contributes to educational fairs, provides venues and show cases, study abroad opportunities and American institutions around Norway. Separately, the Front Office and pol/econ section interact with -- and are often directly included in -- the Norwegian-American Parliamentary Exchange Program (NAPEP) visits to Norway. Incoming officers sometimes have the opportunity to make contact in Washington, DC with the Friends of Norway caucus in Congress, as well as meeting Norwegian diaspora community elements during occasional visits to the U.S. or during Norwegian diaspora community visits to Norway. End Comment.

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